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BUFFER ZONE REQUESTED AROUND FORT RILEY

As more Soldiers are assigned to Fort Riley due to the recent Base Realignment and Closure decision by Congress, expansion to the area communities continues to grow.

Post officials estimate that the Fort Riley area will increase its military population, to include family members of Soldiers, over 25,000 in the next few years. Additionally, post officials also expect an increase in civilian workers to meet this demand. These civilians will be contractors, construction works, teachers, medical personnel, Department of the Army civilians to name a few.

“Fort Riley currently has limited encroachment impacts, but has a high potential that these will rapidly escalate with the increase in population in the area,” said Jeff Keating, Army Compatible Use Buffer program manager. He said with urban development becoming more prevalent around Fort Riley, by the time these impacts become reality, it might be too late to address them.

For this reason, Keating said that Fort Riley would like to establish buffer areas around its training lands. Keating explained that these buffer areas would decrease community conflicts over military activities and training that may cause noise and smoke complaints and reduce potential military training and testing restrictions that might otherwise be imposed. At the same time, ACUB would support conservation of habitat for various grassland dependent species as well as achieve other conservation purposes.

He said this would allow the Army to maximize the availability and accessibility of on-post training land.

“The Army is not wanting to purchase more land to train on,” Keating stressed. “It simply wants to maximize the use of the land we already own and minimize impact to surrounding properties.”

Keating said that several other posts in the United States are involved with ACUB programs.

“The Army wants to be able to train our Soldiers to fight our nation's wars yet also maintain harmony with our community neighbors,” Keating said.

The program allows an agreement between Fort Riley and the Kansas Land Trust to address land use and development around the post, said Craig Phillips, Conservation and Restoration branch chief. He explained that the Kansas Land Trust secures funds from programs such as the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program that can be combined with ACUB funds to support the buffer program.

RoxAnne Miller, executive director of the Kansas Land Trust said, “We are excited about the opportunity to preserve northern Flint Hills ranches and farms by securing funds through the ACUB program. Only through collaborative efforts like this, will we accomplish landscape scale preservation.”

Miller added, “This initiative exemplifies KLT's mission of protecting and preserving lands of ecological, scenic, historic, agricultural or recreational significance in Kansas.”

Phillips explained that the Kansas Land Trust approaches landowners and offers conservation easements to willing recipients.

“The landowners maintain the land, grow crops on it, run livestock, whatever they want to do with the exception of building a home in the buffer zone,” said Phillips.

He said, “The landowners are the winners of this transaction in addition to the Army. Landowners are paid to not build on this property next to the post and still retain the rights to ownership, use and management of the land. It is still theirs!”

Phillips stressed, “The landowners' participation is completely voluntary with the program.”

“As Fort Riley's training intensifies and communities surrounding the boundary of the post grow, it is imperative that training restrictions are averted,” said Keating. “This ACUB program is a win win situation for everyone. The landowners still own their land and this program does not put new land into the Army inventory.

“The program protects Fort Riley's mission,” Keating said.

“Fort Riley is a major Army training post. It's been around a long time,” Keating said. “And, with ACUB, I hope it will be around forever existing in harmony with the environment and our community neighbors.”

